DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 451 CG 017 771

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TITLE Self-Monitoring and Ability to Discriminate Incongruent Communication.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (30th, New Orleans, LA, March 28-31, 1984). Best copy available.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Congruence (Psychology); Discrimination Learning; Higher Education; *Nonverbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS Incongruency Discrimination Assessment; Personal Reaction Inventory (Snyder); *Self Monitoring

ABSTRACT

Snyder's (1974) construct of self-monitoring in communication refers to the degree of self-observation and self-control, guided by situational cues to social appropriateness. To investigate the relationship of level of self-monitoring (high or low) to the ability to accurately discriminate varying levels of incongruent communication, 62 college students (31 males, 31 females) completed the Incongruency Discrimination Assessment (IDA), rating 12 videotaped scenes. The 12 scenes systematically reflected three levels of incongruence (highly congruent, mildly incongruent, highly incongruent), and two types of incongruence (context and affect). Subjects were classified as high or low self-monitors on the basis of their scores on Snyder's Personal Reaction Inventory. An analysis of the results showed that subjects rated levels of incongruence higher as the degree of incongruent behavior increased. A main effect for type of incongruence was also revealed, with the content mode consistently receiving higher incongruence ratings than the affective mode. There was no significant difference between high and low self-monitors on perceptions of incongruence. The findings fail to support the self-monitoring hypothesis. (BL)

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Self-Monitoring and Ability to Discriminate Incongruent Communicatior

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Communication, the vehicle by which individuals relate to one another, is an integral part of all psychotherapies. The perception, reflection, interpretation, and changing of human communicative behavior has received particular attention in the literature due to the work of the communication and systems theorists, but its importance is by no means limited to one school of thought. In his comparative study of psychotherapies, Frank (1974) lists four variables common to all psychological orientations. Communication is an underlying base for each of these variables and, therefore, attention to type and style of communication is an important factor in all theoretical orientations.

The rationale for attending to the process of communication and the extent to which communicative behavior itself is focused on in therapy differs among orientations. Cognitive and systems theorists view communication as an etiological and maintenance factor in psychopathology (Beck, 1976; Haley, 1963,1976). Social learning and behavioral theorists focus on training appropriate communication skills when clients exhibit deficits (Doster & Nesbitt, 1979), while humanistic theorists are primarily interested in the therapists' communication of empathy and unconditional positive regard as necessary and sufficient factors of change (Rogers & Truax, 1967). The psychoanalytic school stresses the importance of attending to the client's communication in order for the therapist to uncover the latent content of the client's messages (Langs, 1973). Although theoretical orientations may not agree on the precise role of communication in therapy, all of the perspectives regard possessing an

awareness of the communication process as important.

Human communication involves a number of different messages at different levels occuring simultaneously. Communication may be separated into two components: content(verbal) messages and affective(paralanguage) messages. The content message involves what is said in terms of the literal worded message. Affective messages involve the nonverbal cues expressed through voice characteristics and kinesics (Key, 1965). When content and affective messages are consistent, they are said to be congruent. When, on the other hand, these messages are contradictory, the result is incongruent communication.

Haley (1963, 1976) states that , in addition to developing an awareness of communication patterns, it is important for therapists to be able to use incongruent communication themselves as a therapeutic technique to overcome resistance in their client(s). Similarly, strategic therapy(Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974) is primarily based on the therapist presenting paradoxes (a type of incongruent communication) as a manipulation in order to effect change in the system. The training of communication skills is also included in behavioral approaches to problems such as assertiveness training (Lange & Jakubowski, 1976) and parent effectiveness training (Patterson, 1971). In light of these positions, the ability to discriminate effective (congruent) communication from ineffective (incongruent) communication and the subsequent ability to model and train effective communication appears important in the training of therapists.

The tendency for an individual to focus on communication has been investigated by Snyder(1974). His construct of self-monitoring is described as the degree of self-observation and self-control guided

by situational cues to social appropriateness. A high self-monitor is sensitive to the communication and self presentation of others in social situations and uses these cues as guidelines for observing and managing his/her own self-presentation and expressive behavior. In contrast, a low self-monitor has little concern for the social appropriateness of his/her presentation and pays little attention to the expression of others.

Snyder developed a scale containing 25 true-false self-descriptive statements to measure self-monitoring. The statements encompass five areas:

1. concern with social appropriateness of one's self-presentation,
2. attention to social comparison information as cues to situationally appropriate expressive behavior,
3. the ability to control and modify self-presentational behavior,
4. use of this ability in specific situations, and
5. extent to which one conforms to be socially appropriate.

Thus, according to the self-monitoring construct, high self-monitoring individuals should be particularly attentive to any social comparison information that might guide their expressive self-presentation. It has not been demonstrated, however, that the level of self-monitoring is a significant factor in the actual ability to accurately perceive communication.

The present study proposed to investigate the relationship of level of self-monitoring to the ability to accurately discriminate varying levels of incongruent communication. In view of previous research on self-monitoring, it was hypothesized that high self-monitors would be better able to discriminate varying types and levels of incongruent communication than would low self-monitors.

Method

Subjects

A total of 62 undergraduate students (31 male and 31 female) who were enrolled in introductory psychology courses at the University of Georgia participated in the study in return for additional course credit.

Measures

A research instrument has been developed to examine an individual's ability to perceive and discriminate different types and levels of communication. The Incongruency Discrimination Assessment (IDA, Tyroler, 1980) consists of twelve video-taped scenes that were systematically developed to reflect three levels of incongruence (highly congruent, mildly incongruent, and highly incongruent) and two types of incongruence (content and affect). Each stimulus scene shows the same actress discussing various aspects of her life. The scenes were carefully constructed with the language and paralanguage cues systematically manipulated to produce a specific content and affective message. Incongruent scenes either have a consistent content message but contradictory cues within the affective message (e.g., content message is "I'm very depressed" but affective cues vary: facial expression indicates pleasure and the voice tone and tempo indicate depression) or have a consistent affective message but contradictory cues within the content message (e.g., all affective cues indicate depression but content message varies: "I'm feeling OK but things look pretty hopeless").

The stimuli range from expressing highly congruent to highly incongruent communication by varying the number of congruent cues within

a message mode (content or affective). The six para-linguistic cues (facial expression, eye contact, body posture, voice tone, voice tempo, and body gestures) are manipulated within the affective message so that six, four, or two cues are consistent with the verbal content. Within the content message, three bits of information are manipulated so that either three, two, or one bit of information is congruent with the affective message.

In order to devise content messages with a known affective pull, the content messages of the stimuli were derived from statements and adjectives included in the Depression Adjective Checklist (Lubin, 1965), the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbach, 1961), and the Speilberger State-Trait Inventory (Speilberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1968). The actress was cued on what types of affective messages to convey through systematically manipulating her use of para-linguistic cues (body posture, gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, tempo of voice, and facial expression).

Procedure

The subjects were instructed, following a training session, to view each stimulus scene and rate the level of incongruence of the content and affective messages on a 7-point Likert scale. In the training session, the subjects received detailed information on the operational definitions of congruent and incongruent messages, and which cues constitute the content message (linguistic cues) and which cues constitute the affective message (paralinguistic cues). Following the presentation of the IDA, the subjects were administered Snyder's Personal Reaction Inventory, which measures self-monitoring. A median split

was performed on the data to classify subjects as either high- or low self-monitors.

Results

A 2 x 2 x 2 x 3 sex by self-monitoring by mode (incongruence of affect vs. content) by level of incongruence analysis of variance was performed on the data. Analysis of variance revealed the level of incongruence to be a significant main effect ($p < .001$); subjects rated levels of incongruence higher as degree of incongruence increased. A main effect for type of incongruence was also revealed ($p < .001$) with the content mode consistently rated higher in terms of incongruence. Analysis of variance further revealed two significant interactions: mode by level ($p < .05$) and sex by mode by level ($p < .025$). The self-monitoring factor was not involved in any significant interactions. The lack of significant difference between high- and low self-monitors on perceptions of incongruence disconfirms the experimental hypothesis.

Discussion

This study was designed to assess the effects of self-monitoring behavior on the ability to accurately discriminate varying levels and types of incongruent communication. The significant mode by level interaction might be due to subjects' confidence in extremes -- either highly congruent or highly incongruent. Subjects appeared to be unsure as to how to evaluate the mild incongruence in level two. The higher level of content incongruence ratings was due primarily to males' ratings as seen in the sex by mode by level interaction.

Failure to confirm the self-monitoring hypothesis suggests that there may not have been sufficient incentives for subjects to the IDA stimuli. Perhaps the experimental setting did not seem "real enough"

to participants for them to put forth sufficient effort.

Research findings have shown that anticipation of future interaction is a significant factor in the ways individuals react to others (Graziano, Brothen, & Berscheid, 1980; Tyler & Sears, 1977). In addition, self-monitoring has been found to be a significant variable in cooperation with persons with whom subjects expected to interact (Danheiser & Graziano,1982). With this research in mind, one could hypothesize that high self-monitors who expected to interact with a stimulus individual would be more attentive to their presentation, and possibly be more able to accurately discriminate incongruent communication.

Another plausible alternative explanation focuses on the self-monitoring scale itself. Recent studies have raised questions about the validity of Snyder's Self-Monitoring Scale (Arkin, Gabrenya, Appelman, & Cochran, 1979; Zehr, 1979). It may be that, in spite of the face validity of the scale, the self-monitoring scale does not sufficiently measure that which it was intended (Zuckerman & Reis, 1979).

Whether the construct of self-monitoring ultimately proves to be useful in examining the ability to discriminate incongruent communication or not, the present study does not provide evidence for the use of the Self-Monitoring Scale as a valid index of this construct. Future research might attempt to increase ecological validity of the experimental setting by introducing an expectancy factor, in addition to assessing the validity of Snyder's Self-Monitoring Scale.

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